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### Breaking the Siege of Sarajevo: Bosnian Army Strategy and Actions to Date

#### Summary:

*The Bosnian Army (ABiH) has kicked off its campaign to break the siege of Sarajevo with a combination of limited attacks against key positions which will position them better for future operations. Efforts to date have been intended to interdict Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) lines of communication, probe for weaknesses, and tie down Serb forces before launching the main offensives from outside the city. The Bosnian Army's major thrusts have been north, southeast, and south of the city, cutting or threatening the BSA's three major resupply routes and restricting the Serbs' access to ammunition and reinforcements. The Bosnian Government's ultimate objective is to cut off Serb populations--both military and civilian--west and south of the city's center, which would give them significant leverage in their dealings with the Serbs and provide the Bosnian Army's most visible victory to date.*



#### Bosnian Army Attacks Around Sarajevo

The Bosnian Army offensive--which began on 16 June--has been generally successful to date, although the main actions are yet to come. The government's campaign to break the siege represents its most ambitious offensive effort to date, and its successful coordination of attacks by elements of several corps suggests an evolution in the ABiH's military sophistication. The Bosnian Army's overarching strategy is to cut the BSA's supply routes, forcing the Serb units surrounding the city to conserve ammunition and thereby limiting their fighting effectiveness. If the Bosnian Army's offensive proves very successful, by interdicting Serb lines of communication they will also have cut off the BSA's preferred routes of retreat and made movement of Serb heavy equipment in any direction extremely difficult.

Bosnian Government forces made significant advances in several directions on the first day of the attack, cutting the Serb supply route north of the city and threatening the road links east towards Pale, and south towards Trnovo and Kalinovik. Government forces lost some ground to Serb counterattacks on 17-18 June but held most of the key terrain features they had taken.

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- North of the city, Bosnian Army forces successfully cut Route Python on 16 June, capturing a swath of territory in the Cemerska Hills and continuing their advance south of the road. Route Python--which continues north to Olovo and eventually to Tuzla--was the only route the Serbs had from the north, allowing reinforcement of their forces around Vogosca and in Hadzici and Stup. If the Bosnian Army eventually managed to take the entire route, it would give them an excellent north-south corridor, although Serb forces will still be able to shell the road from the east. Bosnian Army forces also appear to have mounted a secondary attack toward Ilijas, suggesting an advance along the Visoko-Vogosca road.
- Southeast of the city, Bosnian Army forces made important gains and now threaten the three main road connections to Pale. On 16 June, government forces seized control of the long-contested Debelo Brdo ridgeline, both high positions overlooking Serb transit lines. Later that day, the Bosnian Army continued its advance along this axis, taking positions on Mt. Trebevic and at least threatening to cut the southernmost of the three routes. This road--Route Tuna--is the only one which runs along the southern edge of the city, eventually reaching the Bosnian Serb garrison at Lukavica.
- Approximately 20 kilometers south of the city, Bosnian Army forces expanded on their earlier gains in the Mt. Bjelasnica and Mt. Treskavica areas, coming to within a few kilometers of the Serb-held town of Trnovo. Although the Bosnian Army has not actually cut the Serbs' north-south supply line--Route Viper--it is in a position to interdict traffic along the route.
- Heavy fighting was reported both east and west of Sarajevo airport on 16 June. Bosnian Army forces apparently launched attacks both towards Stup and Nedzarici, but made little or no headway. Bosnian Government forces also attacked near Hadzici, taking key high ground overlooking the town and possibly breaking through the first Serb defense lines.
- Bosnian Army forces fired artillery rounds into Pale on 17, 18, and 19 June, according to press reports. This marks the first time the Bosnian Serb capital has been shelled since 1992.

### **Bosnian Serb Countermoves**

Bosnian Serb responses to the ABiH offensive have been relatively restrained, with shelling primarily directed at areas of confrontation rather than population centers. BSA infantry counterattacks have stalled Bosnian Army advances in some areas, but have not retaken significant amounts of territory.

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- Bosnian Serb forces appear to have successfully resisted government attacks against Stup--one of the few areas where the Serbs have been able to employ their armored forces as maneuver units--and may even have pushed the Bosnian Army back a short distance.
- Bosnian Serb forces blocked Bosnian Army attacks on 17 June near Rajlovac--northwest of the city--causing heavy casualties [redacted] The BSA also stopped attempted Bosnian Army advances around Hrasnica and along the road to Pale. UN spokesmen later said that the Serbs had recaptured the Pale-Lukavica road, although Bosnian Army control of recently-captured positions will allow government forces to fire on Serb vehicles along the way.
- Bosnian Serb and government troops exchanged artillery and mortar fire along the Mt. Trebevic ridgeline on 17 June, but neither side appeared to advance.
- Serbian press claimed that BSA infantry counterattacked in the Mojmiilo hill area south of the city on 17 June, retaking at least one trench line.
- [redacted] the Bosnian Serbs used chemical weapons in their counterattacks southwest of Hadzici [redacted] [redacted] they almost certainly refer to tear gas-type irritants, rather than toxic or lethal chemical agents. [redacted]

### UN Responses to the Deteriorating Situation

UN forces in and around Sarajevo have pulled their forces in from vulnerable positions around Sarajevo in response to the deteriorating security environment. UN peacekeepers abandoned the Weapons Collection Points between 16 and 18 June, after both Bosnian Army and Bosnian Serb forces flaunted UN restrictions on 16 June. Most UN observation posts and checkpoints are continuing to operate, however, and UNMOs are maintaining their routines where possible.

- Bosnian Government forces withdrew about 30 of the 42 pieces of heavy equipment from the Marshal Tito barracks site inside the city, as well as several heavy weapons from the Kosevo tunnel collection point.
- Bosnian Serb forces fired at least 100 rounds from the Osijek weapons collection site west of the city on 16 June. Bosnian Serb forces also used at least three captured UN tanks from the Lukavica Barracks area on 16 June. Serb forces had seized six French light tanks three weeks earlier when they first overran the WCP's and took UN peacekeepers hostage. [redacted]

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Bosnian Serb authorities released the last 26 UN hostages on 18 June. However, Bosnian Army soldiers have confined 560 Canadian troops to their barracks in Visoko and are detaining 8 UN Military Observers in the town, according to UN spokesmen. 

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